

EARLY ELEMENTARY TASKS

WEARING HATS IN SCHOOL

A boy and a girl both wear hats to school. When they come into the classroom, the teacher tells the boy to take his hat off. The teacher says it is polite for boys and men to take their hats off indoors. The girl’s hat matches her outfit. The teacher does not say anything to the girl.

The boy asks the teacher why he has to take his hat off but the girl is allowed to leave her hat on.

- * Introduce the scenario as a skit, which you rehearse in advance with a boy and a girl from the class.

Benchmarks for this Scenario: III.1.EE.2, III.2.EE.1, III.3.EE.1, and III.4.EE.2

Related Core Democratic Values: Diversity, Rule of Law, Freedom of Expression

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should the school do about letting boys and girls wear hats in the classroom?

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should schools allow boys and girls to wear hats in school?

Notes:

WHO GETS TO PLAY?

Billy, Sam, and Jennifer liked to play together. They especially liked to build with blocks. Together, they planned and built big, complicated block cities that had roads, buildings, and tunnels. The kindergarten teacher let the children who had finished their school work choose an activity such as painting, modeling clay, acting out stories, or playing with blocks. The “blocks area” was in a corner of the classroom. A sign on the wall said four children could play there at a time.

One day Billy, Sam, and Jennifer finished their work quickly. Soon they were in the corner building an elaborate city of blocks. Tanya, a new child in school, asked if she could play with them. Sam told Tanya she could play in another part of the “blocks area,” but she could not use any of the blocks because he and his friends needed all the blocks for their city. He said she could not help build the city because he, Jennifer, and Billy had already decided what to do, and he was afraid Tanya would mess it up. Tanya sat in an empty part of the “blocks area” and buried her face in her hands. The teacher called the children together to discuss the situation.

- * Instead of reading the scenario to the children, you may want to present it as a skit involving you and four of the children. When you, the teacher, call the children together, extend the skit to the entire class.

Benchmarks for this Scenario: III.2.EE.1, III.3.EE.1, and III.4.EE.1

Related Core Democratic Values: Justice, Equality, Diversity, Common Good

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should children in kindergarten do to make new friends?

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should the teacher allow children to exclude other children from their play?

Notes:

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"YOU CAN'T PLAY"

The children in the kindergarten class have agreed to a new rule, "You can't say 'you can't play.'" When other children tell one child "you can't play," the child may feel left out and unhappy. Sometimes children who are told "you can't play" think they do not have any friends.

Jimmy is playing by himself. He wants everyone to go away and leave him alone. Ben wants to play with him. When Jimmy says he would rather play by himself, Ben reminds him of the new rule, "You can't say 'you can't play.'"

Benchmarks for this Scenario: III.2.EE.1, III.3.EE.1, and III.4.EE.2

Related Core Democratic Values: Justice, Equality, Diversity, Common Good

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should the kindergartners do about children who want to play alone?

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should a teacher allow kindergartners to play alone at school?

Notes:

THE OLD HOUSE

Henry moved into an old house in the neighborhood. Some of the windows in this house were broken, and the grass was very long. The neighbors were happy when Henry moved in. They thought he would fix up the house and cut the grass. But Henry liked the house the way it was, and he did not fix it up nor did he cut the grass. The neighbors offered to help but Henry refused their help. He told the neighbors, "I like my house the way it is."

Benchmarks for this Scenario: III.3.EE.1, III.4.EE.2, and III.4.EE.3

Related Core Democratic Values: Pursuit of Happiness, Common Good, Diversity

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should the neighbors do about Henry's house?

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should the city make everyone keep up their property in the same way their neighbors do?

Notes: Teachers may find it useful to refer to *Old Henry*, a book by Joan W. Blos, copyright 1987, published by Mulberry Paperbook Books, ISBN #0-688-09935-1.

THE LITTLE LOST DOG

It is a rainy day. Tammy is on her way to school. Tammy likes school. She likes animals, too.

Tammy sees a small dog who looks lost and frightened. She checks for a collar, but the dog is not wearing one. She thinks she recognizes the dog as one that belongs to a family in a different part of town. Tammy is afraid the dog will get hurt or lost. If she stops to help the dog, she will be late for school.

- * If most of the children in your class ride a school bus, adjust the scenario to have Tammy walking to the school bus stop; if she stops to help the dog she will miss the bus.

Benchmarks for this Scenario: III.2.EE.1, and III.4.EE.1

Related Core Democratic Values: Common Good, Rule of Law

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should Tammy do about the little lost dog?

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should schools discipline children who, on their way to school, stop to help those in need?

Notes:

OLDER CHILDREN ON THE PLAYGROUND

Before school, after school, during lunch time, and at recess, the older children swarm over all the swings, seesaws, and slides on the playground. They swing high into the air and try to bump into each other. They try to bump each other off the seesaws. They chase each other up and down the slides. They laugh and enjoy the fun.

The first graders are afraid to swing and slide at the same time as the bigger, rougher children. They are afraid of getting pushed and hurt, so the first graders never get a chance to use the equipment.

Benchmarks for this Scenario: III.1.EE.2, III.2.EE.1, III.3.EE.1, and III.4.EE.2

Related Core Democratic Values: Common Good, Justice

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should be done to see that the playground is used fairly?

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should the community create rules that restrict playground use for different age groups at different times of day?

Notes:

EARLY ELEMENTARY TASKS

BICYCLE SAFETY

Many children ride bicycles. Too often, children get hurt in bicycle accidents. Your community wants to find ways to make bicycle riding safer.

- * You may want to research local bicycle accidents before you start this activity. Newspaper clippings about specific bicycle accidents would be an excellent way to introduce the scenario.

Benchmarks for this Scenario: III.1.EE.2, and III.1.EE.3

Related Core Democratic Values: Common Good, Rule of Law

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should your community do to help make it safer for children to ride bicycles?

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should your community require all bicycle riders to pass a bicycle safety test?

Notes:

LITTER

Imagine that your school has a problem with litter on the school grounds. This year there is more litter than ever. The principal and the student government are concerned. They are asking each class to submit a proposal for a way to solve the litter problem.

Benchmarks for this Scenario: III.2.EE.3, III.1.EE.2, III.4.EE.1, and III.4.EE.3

Related Core Democratic Values: Common Good, Justice

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should the school do about the problem of litter on the school grounds?

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should the school have a policy that requires students to pick up litter?

Notes:

EARLY ELEMENTARY TASKS

A NEW NEIGHBORHOOD PARK

Pretend that your city council is thinking about building a new park in your neighborhood. Everyone from babies to senior citizens will use the park. The city council is asking people who live in the neighborhood to suggest where to build the park and what to put in it. The city council also wants your suggestions for rules to keep the park a safe, enjoyable place for people of all ages.

*Customize the scenario to fit your own community.

Benchmarks for this Scenario: II.1.EE.1, II.1.EE.2, II.2.EE.3, and III.1.EE.1

Related Core Democratic Values: Justice, Diversity, Common Good

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should the city council consider in planning the location, design and rules for the new park?

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should the city council adopt a plan for the new park which includes features for all people, even though it means less room for children?

Notes:

RESTORING A HISTORIC HOUSE

A house in your community was built during the early 1800s, when there was slavery in parts of the United States. It served as an important station on the underground railroad for slaves who were running away. Hundreds of runaway slaves hid in the house on their way to Canada.

Years ago, school classes and other groups used to tour this historic house. They saw its secret hiding places and imagined what it would be like to be a runaway slave or someone helping to hide a runaway slave. However, in the last 15 years, no one has taken care of the house. It needs painting and a lot of other work. The community now owns the house and is trying to decide what to do with it.

- * If possible, substitute a real historic site in or near your community, such as a one-room schoolhouse or an old commercial building downtown.

Benchmarks for this Scenario: I.2.LE.2, II.3.LE.4, IV.1.LE.1, and IV.3.LE.1

*Some benchmarks may vary with the historic landmark you select.

Related Core Democratic Values: Common Good, Individual Rights

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should your community do with an important historic landmark?

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should your community spend tax dollars to restore an important historic landmark?

Notes:

LATER ELEMENTARY TASKS

SCHOOL UNIFORMS

Schools across the country are considering dress codes or even school uniforms to help reduce student violence. Often a school chooses a group of clothes such as a particular kind of slacks, shorts, skirt, long- and short-sleeved shirt, sweater, jacket, scarf and hat, and shoes. The group of clothes may include both solid colors and coordinated plaids. Schools may work with stores to make sure the clothes do not cost too much.

Many private schools already require uniforms. Some people say uniforms help students to concentrate, take pride in their school, and quit worrying about who has the most stylish clothes. Some people dislike uniforms because they think students should be free to express themselves through their clothes.

Benchmarks for this Scenario: III.2.LE.2, III.3.LE.2, and IV.1.LE.2

Related Core Democratic Values: Individual Rights, Common Good

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should Michigan schools do about school uniforms?

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should the state legislature require Michigan students to wear uniforms to school?

Notes:

WHERE MAY WE USE OUR SKATEBOARDS?

Shana and Shane are twins. They recently celebrated their eighth birthday. They were very excited because they got the birthday presents they had asked for: skateboards, one for Shana and another for Shane. The building they live in has no driveway or other paved, level place. Shana and Shane asked their parents to drive them to a nearby public parking lot so they could play on their skateboards. There were no cars in the parking lot. It seemed like the perfect place to play.

As soon as they started to play on their skateboards, a police officer stopped to talk to the family. The officer said no skateboards were allowed on public property. He said this was a warning, but if the children used their skateboards on public property again they would get a ticket and have to pay a \$25.00 fine. Shana and Shane got back in the car. On the ride home they asked their parents, "Where can we use our skateboards?"

Benchmarks for this Scenario: II.4.LE.2, III.1.LE.1, III.1.LE.2, and IV.3.LE.1

Related Core Democratic Values: Pursuit of Happiness, Common Good

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should children do to enjoy their skateboards legally?

- * Ask children where they can skateboard in their own community, and whether they have a problem similar to that of the twins. Have them draw maps to show current and potential skateboarding locations. Before beginning this unit you may want to check with your local police about where skateboarding is or is not permitted.

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should the community allow skateboards on public property?

Notes:

LATER ELEMENTARY TASKS

FOREIGN CARS IN THE UNITED STATES

For years, making and selling cars has been a very important activity for the state of Michigan. However, many cars sold in the United States now come from other countries. Some Americans have jobs making and selling foreign cars. The large number of foreign cars in the United States helps Americans in some ways and hurts them in other ways.

Benchmarks for this Scenario: II.3.LE.1, II.4.LE.4, IV.2.LE.3, and IV.5.LE.2

Related Core Democratic Values: Common Good, Individual Rights

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should American policy be about letting foreign cars into the United States?

- * You may want to explain the concepts of import duties and import quotas. Students will need to investigate the current policy on automobile imports from other countries and how the policy has changed over time.

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should Congress create a policy allowing fewer foreign cars to be sold in the United States?

Notes:

WHO GETS TO USE THE KICKBALL FIELD?

Your school has only one kickball field. A certain group of older boys always uses the field. These older boys do not allow anyone else to play there when they want to use the field.

One day, before the boys arrived, a group of girls ran out to the field and started to play kickball. Later the boys arrived and chased the girls off the field so that the boys could use it for their regular game. The girls were very angry.

Benchmarks for this Scenario: III.1.LE.2, III.3.LE.2, and III.4.LE.2

Related Core Democratic Values: Justice, Common Good

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should the school do about conflicts over the use of the kickball field?

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should the school administration enforce a “first come, first served” policy for the use of outdoor school facilities?

Notes:

THE HOUSE WITH FOUR PILLARS

The house with four pillars has stood at the corner since before the Civil War. Its stately verandas and imposing Doric columns identify the architecture as Greek Revival. Shade trees and gardens with wrought-iron benches beautify the site, just a block from the river. As the community has grown, the corner where the house stands has become a busy intersection near the center of town. Shoppers like to pause in the shade or rest on the benches between errands. Drivers at the intersection admire the house while they wait for the traffic light to change. The Chamber of Commerce uses a picture of the house on its letterhead and promotional material.

No family has lived in the house for many years. It recently housed a dentist’s office, an attorney’s office, and a real estate agency. Now it holds several small specialty shops, but the shop owners cannot pay the owner of the house enough rent to cover the cost of upkeep. The owner wants to tear the house down and use the site for a small drive-in bank and parking lot. The neighborhood association and the Chamber of Commerce are unhappy about the owner’s plan.

Benchmarks for this Scenario: III.1.LE.3, III.4.LE.1, III.4.LE.2, and III.4.LE.3
Related Core Democratic Values: Common Good, Individual Rights

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should the community do about the owner’s plan to replace the old house with a drive-in bank and parking lot?

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should the city council allow owners of buildings that are special to the community to do whatever they want with their property?

Notes:

EMPLOYMENT VERSUS ENVIRONMENT

You live in a small town that has a high unemployment rate. A company wants to buy a large piece of land on the edge of town to use as a toxic-waste disposal site. The company will get rid of poisonous chemicals by burning them or burying them in underground containers. The company plans to hire 1,000 employees.

A new industry would be good for your town's economy. People need the jobs. On the other hand, some people are afraid that poison from the chemicals might get into the air they breath or the water they drink. People are also afraid that working with poisonous chemicals might be bad for their health. The company promises that its waste disposal processes will meet government standards and will pose no danger to employees or the community.

Benchmarks for this Scenario: I.4.LE.2, II.3.LE.1, and III.1.LE.1

Related Core Democratic Values: Common Good, Individual Rights, Life

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should the town do to protect the health and safety of its citizens while strengthening the economy by encouraging new industry?

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should town policy allow a company to operate a toxic-waste disposal site nearby?

Notes:

LATER ELEMENTARY TASKS

COLUMBUS DAY

For more than a hundred years, children in the United States learned in school that Christopher Columbus discovered America in 1492. Americans celebrate Columbus Day each year on the second Monday in October.

Of course, people already lived in the Americas before Christopher Columbus arrived. Many schools have changed their American history classes to include information about the Native Americans who lived here before 1492. Some people think that celebrating Columbus Day is an insult to the people who arrived in and settled America long before Columbus.

Benchmarks for this Scenario: I.2.LE.1, I.3.LE.2, I.4.LE.1, and II.3.LE.2

Related Core Democratic Values: Diversity, Truth, Patriotism, Justice

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should Americans do about celebrating Columbus Day?

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should United States policy making Columbus Day a federal holiday be changed?

Notes:

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR SCHOOLS

Disruptive behavior is a serious problem in American schools. Students who misbehave in class can prevent others from learning. Teachers who must spend their time maintaining order in the classroom have less time to teach. Some school systems have set up alternative educational programs for violent and disruptive students. The removal of those students from regular classrooms lets other students and teachers concentrate on learning instead of discipline.

The American Federation of Teachers has recommended that schools have disciplinary codes and enforce them systematically.

Benchmarks for this Scenario: III.1.LE.1, III.1.LE.2, III.4.LE.1, and III.4.LE.2

Related Core Democratic Values: Common Good, Separation of Powers,
Rule of Law

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should schools do about disruptive behavior in the classroom

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should the Michigan legislature create a statewide code of conduct for public schools?

Notes:

MIDDLE SCHOOL TASKS

AN ENDANGERED BIRD SPECIES

The Kirtland's Warbler is very rare. A small, blue-gray bird with a bright yellow breast, it constantly twitches its tail when it perches. It nests only in the northern part of the lower peninsula of Michigan, where young jack pines grow in the sandy soil. The Kirtland's Warbler builds its nest in small, grassy openings on the ground among the jack pines.

Both United States law and Michigan law protect the Kirtland's Warbler as an endangered species. Forest managers and conservationists are working to save the Kirtland's Warbler from extinction.

Benchmarks for this Scenario: II.2.MS.2, II.2.MS.4, and II.2.MS.5

Related Core Democratic Values: Common Good, Individual Rights

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should Michigan do to protect endangered species such as the Kirtland's Warbler?

- * Encourage students to debate whether it is important to protect endangered species at all.

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should Michigan laws allow developers to build without restriction in areas where the Kirtland's Warbler lives?

Notes:

TOURISTS IN ANTARCTICA

The cruise ship has sailed from the southern tip of South America. It is now anchored off the coast of Antarctica. Tourists muffled in down parkas are scrambling ashore from large rubber rafts. The penguins gather to observe this unfamiliar sight. The tourists snap photographs of each other, the penguins, and the barren landscape around them. After an hour they will board the rafts again for the short ride back to the ship. They have paid thousands of dollars for this once-in-a-lifetime trip.

They can stay only an hour because this frozen continent has no facilities for tourists. There are no restaurants or hotels. There are no bathrooms or garbage cans. There is no one to empty the trash and nowhere to put it. In spite of the lack of facilities, more and more people are signing up for this unique adventure. Environmentalists worry about the harm that could be done to Antarctica if it becomes a popular place to visit. It is not clear who, if anyone, will be responsible for providing tourist facilities or controlling the impact of tour groups on the environment of Antarctica.

Benchmarks for this Scenario: II.2.MS.4, II.2.MS.5, II.4.MS.4, III.5.MS.1, III.5.MS.2, and IV.5.MS.1

Related Core Democratic Values: Individual Rights, Common Good, Rule of Law

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should the international community do to control the potential effects of tourism on Antarctica?

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should the nations of the world agree to limit the number of visitors to Antarctica?

Notes:

MIDDLE SCHOOL TASKS

THE FUTURE OF PUERTO RICO

It is election time again in Puerto Rico. Each of the three main parties is campaigning to promote its candidate for governor and its vision for the future of Puerto Rico. The Popular Democratic party, founded in 1938, advocates maintaining Puerto Rico's current status as a United States commonwealth. The New Progressive party, founded in 1967, says that Puerto Rico should become a state of the United States. The Puerto Rican Independence party, founded in 1946, favors independence for the island. Each group promises a better life for all Puerto Ricans.

Benchmarks for this Scenario: I.4.MS.4, II.3.MS.4, II.5.MS.3, and III.1.MS.2

Related Core Democratic Values: Popular Sovereignty, Justice, Federalism

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should be the status of Puerto Rico in relation to the United States?

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should the United States change the status of Puerto Rico?

Notes:

MADE IN AMERICA

Juanita sat down at the cafeteria table to eat her lunch. Her best friend, Rachel, was already there. Rachel looked sad and did not eat much. Juanita asked her friend what was wrong. Rachel said her father was worried about losing his job at the factory. Rachel said not enough people were buying the sweatsuits her father and his co-workers made. There was too much competition. Rachel's father blamed people who did not "buy American."

After lunch, Juanita went to class. She stared at the large world map on the wall and thought about Rachel's problem. Was there anything just one person or even one school could do? How many things in the classroom came from other countries? That gave Juanita an idea. She would investigate the situation in her own school. Perhaps she could get Rachel and other friends to help her. Should they try to persuade their own school to "buy American"?

Benchmarks for this Scenario:

II.3.MS.3, IV.1.MS.1, and IV.5.MS.3

Related Core Democratic Values:

Common Good, Patriotism,
Separation of Powers

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should the school policy be toward buying supplies made in other countries?

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should the school consider country of origin as a factor in purchasing decisions?

Notes:

CHEROKEE REMOVAL

In the 1970s, many Native Americans began to pressure the United States government to make amends for past injustices such as confiscation of Native American lands and failure to honor treaty obligations. The Native American Rights Fund, staffed by attorneys who are Native Americans, uses the courts to try to regain title to tribal lands it claims the United States government seized illegally. One legal challenge concerns land claims by the Cherokee Nation. When the state of Georgia wanted to confiscate Cherokee tribal lands in the 1830s, the Supreme Court ruled on the legality of the confiscation in *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* and *Worcester v. Georgia*, but the decisions were not enforced. Under the Indian Removal Act of 1830, federal army troops marched many of the Cherokees from Georgia to Oklahoma in 1838–39. Their route is often remembered as the “Trail of Tears.”

As a federal district court judge in Georgia, you have been assigned to the case. The Cherokees are demanding the return of their lands in Georgia. Your decision involves two legal questions: Was the federal government responsible for Georgia’s seizure of Cherokee lands and, if so, what should federal policy be on compensating the Cherokee Nation for its loss?

Benchmarks for this Scenario: I.2.MS.1, I.3.MS.3, and I.4.MS.4

Related Core Democratic Values: Life, Liberty, Pursuit of Happiness,
Justice, Diversity

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should the federal government do now about the forcible removal of Cherokees from Georgia more than 150 years ago?

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should the federal government compensate the Cherokees for their loss of tribal lands in Georgia in the 1830s?

Notes:

RECONSTRUCTION IN THE AMERICAN SOUTH

The American Civil War has ended, but the task of rebuilding the nation has just begun. You are among the advisors the president has assembled to help him plan for Reconstruction to heal the nation. He has asked his advisors to recommend a plan for Reconstruction that will best satisfy interest groups that have conflicting motives and purposes. Most of the former slaves in the South lack land, jobs, property, and education. The president wants to ensure the former slaves' political rights and the means to support themselves. He also wants to draw the former rebels back into the Union without setting off a backlash among them. He wants to convince Northerners that the sacrifices they made during the war served a purpose. The president needs the cooperation of all segments of American society to make Reconstruction a success.

Benchmarks for this Scenario: I.1.MS.1, I.1.MS.2, I.3.MS.1, and I.4.MS.1

Related Core Democratic Values: Equality, Justice, Liberty, Federalism

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should the United States government have done to convince Southern states to cooperate in guaranteeing political rights and economic opportunity to former slaves?

- * Good collections of primary sources include The Black American, A History in Their Own Words 1619-1983 (Harper Trophy Division of Harper Collins) and Voices of Freedom, Sources in American History (Prentice-Hall).

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should the United States' policies of Reconstruction have placed more emphasis on voting rights for former slaves?

Notes:

MIDDLE SCHOOL TASKS

URBAN MIGRATION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Population growth and urban migration were hot topics in June 1996 at Habitat II, a United Nations-sponsored conference on cities. Participants discussed population projections for major cities in developing countries, the reasons for massive migration from rural to urban areas, the many problems caused by rapid urban growth, and the ways some countries have tried to respond.

You are on the United Nations staff. Your job is to advise the governments of developing countries on ways to manage their growing urban populations.

Benchmarks for this Scenario: II.1.MS.3, II.2.MS.5, and II.3.MS.4

Related Core Democratic Values: Pursuit of Happiness, Common Good

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should developing countries do to manage their growing urban populations?

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should the United Nations advise the governments of developing countries to adopt policies limiting urban migration and relocating people from cities to other parts of the country?

* Make sure students recognize the human rights issues involved in forced relocation.

Notes:

SLAVERY UNDER THE UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION

It is the summer of 1787, and the government of the United States is facing its worst crisis since the War of Independence. The Articles of Confederation have not been strong enough to meet the needs of the new country. Delegates from 12 states (all but Rhode Island) are meeting to draw up a new constitution that will create a stronger federal government. The delegates have decided that the new government will have a Congress with two houses. In one house the states will have equal representation; in the other they will be represented in proportion to their population.

The question of representation leads to a discussion of slavery. Will slaves be counted as part of the total population for purposes of calculating representation in Congress? Other questions about slavery include whether there should be any limitation on importing slaves from abroad or buying and selling slaves within the country. As a delegate at the Constitutional Convention, you want to reach a solution on slavery that will be acceptable to your state, good for the nation, and will encourage ratification of the Constitution by all the states.

Benchmarks for this Scenario: I.3.MS.1, I.3.MS.4, I.4.MS.1, and I.4.MS.4

Related Core Democratic Values: Life, Liberty, Pursuit of Happiness, Justice

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should the delegates at the Constitutional Convention have put in the Constitution on the subject of slavery?

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should the United States government compensate African Americans who can trace their ancestry to former slaves for the loss of their freedom?

Notes:

THE THREE GORGES DAM ON THE YANGTZE RIVER

For thousands of years, China has known cycles of famine caused by flooding and drought. Chinese rulers earned allegiance by controlling flooding and managing the irrigation systems; rulers who failed to do so fell from power. In keeping with that tradition, Dr. Sun Yat-sen proposed a dam project on the Yangtze River in 1919. Now the Chinese government has begun to construct the massive Three Gorges Dam, midway between the source of the Yangtze in Tibet and its mouth at Shanghai. The project will take 14 years to complete and will cost billions of dollars. Its two main goals are to control the Yangtze floodwaters, which have claimed 500,000 lives in the twentieth century alone, and to provide hydroelectric power to reduce China's dependence on coal.

China will provide its own labor and materials, but must buy a few specialized services and manufactured goods from the United States to complete the project. China needs to borrow U.S. dollars to meet those expenses. The finance committee of the Export-Import Bank, a U.S. government agency, is deciding whether or not to approve a three billion dollar loan to China to pay for the things it will buy from American suppliers to finish the dam. The Three Gorges Dam project is controversial because of environmental concerns, possible human rights abuses, and possible danger to ancient ruins and scenic gorges.

Benchmarks for this Scenario: I.2.MS.3, II.2.MS.4, II.2.MS.5, and II.4.MS.2

Related Core Democratic Values: Common Good

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should the United States do to support or discourage the Chinese construction of a dam on the Yangtze River?

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should the Export-Import Bank help finance large-scale flood control and hydroelectric power projects abroad?

Notes:

TERM LIMITS

A national foundation plans to sponsor a public discussion about a proposed constitutional amendment. This amendment would limit the number of consecutive terms a member of Congress may serve. Your class will send a team to participate in the discussion. The team needs briefing materials in order to represent your class effectively. Specifically, the team members want you to give them the following kinds of background information:

1. The exact legal process involved in amending the Constitution;
2. A description of the major individuals or groups that support a term limits amendment and their arguments;
3. A description of the major individuals or groups that oppose a term limits amendment and their arguments;
4. An assessment of the problems a term limits amendment would solve and the problems it would create; and
5. A recommendation for the position the team should take on the proposed amendment, with the reasoning process that supports the recommendation.

Benchmarks for this Scenario: III.1.HS.1, III.1.HS.2, III.1.HS.3, III.3.HS.3, and III.4.HS.1

Related Core Democratic Values: Pursuit of Happiness, Common Good, Equality

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should be done about the length of time a member of Congress may remain in office?

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should the United States Constitution be amended to limit the number of consecutive terms a member of Congress may serve?

Notes:

HIGH SCHOOL TASKS

DEFINING AND DEFENDING AMERICAN INTEREST ABROAD

The year is 1992. The president of the United States has asked his cabinet's advice about the civil war in Bosnia. There are reports that thousands of Bosnian civilians have been killed or driven from their homes. Many Americans, including some members of Congress, are putting pressure on the United States President to intervene.

You are on the staff of an influential member of the cabinet. The cabinet member has asked you to analyze the arguments for and against United States intervention in Bosnia, list and evaluate policy alternatives, and make a recommendation.

Benchmarks for this Scenario: I.4.HS.2, I.4.HS.4, III.2.HS.2, and III.5.HS.1

Related Core Democratic Values: Pursuit of Happiness, Justice

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should the United States do about situations abroad that violate human values but do not directly threaten American national security?

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should the United States use force to protect human rights in other countries?

Notes:

COMPUTER COMMUNICATION

Last year a local business donated money to your public library to install additional computers and provide the general public with access to the Internet. The library set up the system and people began to use it. Users paid the library a small fee to cover expenses.

Several citizens attended a recent library board meeting to voice their concerns. One person warned that the Internet could be used to transmit obscene or pornographic material. Another argued that certain computer discussion groups promoted racial or religious prejudice. After the meeting, some people formed a citizens' group to persuade the library board to restrict Internet access. They wanted the library to give computer users access only to selected, approved educational materials.

Benchmarks for this Scenario: III.2.HS.1, III.2.HS.2, and III.3.HS.2

Related Core Democratic Values: Pursuit of Happiness, Liberty, Truth

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should be the public library's role in relation to computer communications?

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should the public library restrict Internet access?

Notes:

BALANCED FEDERAL BUDGETS

Most presidents and members of Congress agree that federal budget deficits strain the economy. They know, however, that while the American public approves of a balanced budget in principle, support declines when a balanced budget is described in terms of higher taxes or cuts in programs. Political candidates often speak about balanced budgets in general terms, without discussing the costs.

This year's Congress has challenged the president to show good faith by submitting a balanced budget for the coming year. The president has decided to accept the challenge. He wants you, as a member of his staff, to draft a proposal for specific spending cuts, in combination with tax increases, if necessary, sufficient to bring the federal budget into balance. He will review your proposal with congressional leaders of both parties.

Benchmarks for this Scenario: IV.3.HS.1, IV.3.HS.2, IV.3.HS.4, and IV.3.HS.5

Related Core Democratic Values: Checks and Balances, Representative Government

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should the president and Congress do about the federal budget deficit?

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should the president and Congress agree as a matter of policy to adopt a balanced budget each year, except in times of war or national emergency?

Notes:

FEDERAL TAXES

You work on the staff of a member of Congress who sits on the House Ways and Means committee. Everyone on the committee agrees that the tax code should be simplified, though they disagree over details of how to simplify it. However, the member you work for has received letters from a number of constituents who say the progressive income tax should be scrapped altogether. They say the tax is unfair and works as an economic disincentive. They say the United States got along very well without a progressive income tax for most of its history. Various constituents recommend a proportional income tax, a wealth tax, a national sales tax, or some other form of revenue.

Benchmarks for this Scenario: IV.3.HS.1, IV.3.HS.2, IV.3.HS.4, and IV.3.HS.5

Related Core Democratic Values: Justice, Equality

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should be the principal source of revenue for the United States government?

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should the United States legislature replace the federal progressive income tax by a different source of revenue?

Notes:

THE USE OF TARIFFS TO ACHIEVE ECONOMIC GOALS

President Clinton faced an economic problem in relation to China. American companies complained that some companies in China had been “pirating” American movie videos and music and computer game CDs—that is, illegally copying them and selling the copies in China without paying any money to the American companies that created the movies, music, or games. The American companies said that they were losing millions of dollars each year. They wanted the president to do something.

President Clinton announced in May 1996 that, unless the Chinese government stopped the companies from pirating American videos and CDs, the United States would impose a one hundred percent tariff on a variety of Chinese products, including silk goods, microwave ovens, and video camera equipment. Use of tariffs has a long and controversial history. If the tariffs Clinton announced go into effect, American consumers will have to pay twice as much for those imports, and Chinese exports will suffer. China threatened to retaliate by placing tariffs on its imports from the United States.

Benchmarks for this Scenario: I.4.HS.4, II.3.HS.1, II.3.HS.2, II.4.HS.4, IV.4.HS.2, IV.4.HS.3, and IV.4.HS.5

Related Core Democratic Values: Patriotism, Justice, Common Good

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should the president do about Chinese pirating of American videos and music and computer CDs?

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should the United States use tariffs to protect American companies?

Notes:

CHINA AND THE ENVIRONMENT

You have been asked to represent your high school at an international conference about China and the environment. The conference organizers tell you the keynote speaker will say that China's economic development poses a major threat to the earth's atmosphere. According to the keynote speaker, China is a huge country where international trade and rising living standards will bring enormous growth in the number of trucks, tractors, and automobiles. The keynote speaker will say that current laws in China do little to control the air pollution that is likely to result from so many vehicles.

The conference organizers have asked you, in your speech at the conference, to evaluate the keynote speaker's argument and discuss what the international community should do to protect the atmosphere.

Benchmarks for this Scenario: II.1.HS.1, II.2.HS.1, and II.3.HS.2

Related Core Democratic Values: Common Good, Rule of Law

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should the international policy be regarding pollution of the atmosphere associated with rapid economic growth in developing nations?

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should the world's nations form an international environmental organization with the power to enforce environmental standards around the world?

Notes:

HIGH SCHOOL TASKS

DISCOURAGING ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION TO MICHIGAN

Some people complain that too many undocumented aliens, or illegal immigrants, live in Michigan. To control the movement of such people to Michigan, they say, the state should stop giving undocumented aliens social services such as education, health care, or food stamps. Other people argue that agriculture in some parts of Michigan depends on migrant labor and would suffer if the state discouraged the movement of people.

The Migrant Services Division of the Michigan Family Independence Agency has hired your research firm to investigate the possible effects of a change in state policy toward social services for undocumented aliens. They have asked you to document the extent of illegal immigration to Michigan, its impact on different parts of the state, the economic benefits it brings to communities, the burdens it places on local governments, and the probable costs and benefits of changing state policies toward undocumented aliens.

Benchmarks for this Scenario: II.3.HS.1, II.3.HS.2, II.4.HS.3, and II.4.HS.4

Related Core Democratic Values: Liberty, Pursuit of Happiness, Common Good, Justice

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should Michigan do about the movement of undocumented aliens into the state?

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should Michigan try to limit the movement of undocumented aliens by changing its social services policy?

Notes:

BUSINESS PRACTICES IN OTHER COUNTRIES

A local college has organized a symposium about the role of the United States in the global economy. You have been selected as a high school student to participate in a panel discussion about businesses in other countries that maintain unsafe working conditions, employ child labor, and pollute the environment. You have been asked to recommend ways the international community, the United States government, American businesses, and American consumers should relate to such businesses, and to the countries where the businesses are located. You have also been asked to comment on the argument that independent nations have the right to make their own rules about business practices, without interference from the rest of the world.

Benchmarks for this Scenario: II.1.HS.1, II.3.HS.1, II.3.HS.2, II.4.HS.3, II.4.HS.4, II.5.HS.2, III.5.HS.1, and III.5.HS.2

Related Core Democratic Values: Life, Liberty, Pursuit of Happiness, Justice

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should the United States do about businesses in other countries that have unsafe working conditions, use child labor, and harm the environment?

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should the United States change its trade policy to pressure other countries to enforce laws against unsafe working conditions, child labor, and industrial pollution?

Notes:

ETHNIC CONFLICT IN THE BALKANS

The Balkan peninsula was called the powder keg of Europe on the eve of World War I. One cause of the war was the mix of languages, religions, and cultures in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, especially in the Balkans. After the war the victors redrew the map of Europe and stated the ideal of national self-determination. They grouped diverse southern Slavs together into one country, Yugoslavia. For a while, a strong leader, Tito, held Yugoslavia together.

In the 1990s, ethnic strife broke out among people who had lived as neighbors and prospered together. Parts of Yugoslavia broke away and declared themselves independent states. The population was so mixed that the new states still had ethnic minorities within them. Soon, parts of the Balkans were engulfed in ethnic discrimination, civil war, and mass murder. Your role is to act as an advisor to the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission. Investigate and prepare your report according to the questions that follow.

Benchmarks for this Scenario: I.2.HS.3, I.3.HS.2, I.3.HS.3, and I.4.HS.2
Related Core Democratic Values: Freedom of Religion, Individual Rights, Justice

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should be done in the Balkans to ensure both self-determination and minority rights?

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should the international community make its recognition of new or breakaway republics conditional on specific criteria, including guaranteed protection for ethnic and religious minorities?

Notes:

NATIONAL HISTORY STANDARDS

Since the publication of A Nation at Risk in 1983, professionals in nearly every educational discipline have carried out a process to define the basic concepts of their discipline. They have drafted national standards for each level of schooling so as to provide guidance for teacher training, classroom teaching, and measuring student achievement. Advocates of national standards hope that clear, rigorous, and relevant standards of knowledge for each discipline will ultimately improve student performance.

In no discipline have the national standards aroused more controversy than in history. The National History Standards proposed in 1994 sparked a firestorm of criticism. The United States Senate voted to condemn them. In 1996, a revised set of National History Standards appeared and again stirred much controversy.

Benchmarks for this Scenario: I.4.HS.1, I.4.HS.3, and I.4.HS.4

Related Core Democratic Values: Common Good, Diversity, Truth, Patriotism

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should be included in the National History Standards?

- * Guide discussion, if necessary, to help students understand why the history standards are so controversial.

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should Congress change the National History Standards to put more emphasis on European history?

Notes:

REGISTRATION FOR THE DRAFT

The year is 2002. The United States has troops committed to peacekeeping operations in Chechnya, Bosnia, Palestine, Cyprus, Kuwait, and South Korea. Without provocation, North Korea invades South Korea. Five hundred American soldiers die in the attack. The president of the United States says that an independent South Korea is vital to American national security interests. He calls for war to defend American lives in South Korea and honor American treaty commitments. Congress supports him and declares war. The president orders all Americans between the ages of 18 and 25 to register for the draft immediately.

Stan Bristol, is a 20-year-old premedical student. He opposes taking human life except in self-defense, but he does not belong to a religious group. Stan does not register for the draft. He is arrested and, if found guilty, faces a term in prison.

Benchmarks for this Scenario: I.3.HS.2, I.3.HS.3, I.4.HS.4, III.2.HS.1, III.2.HS.2, and III.3.HS.2

Related Core Democratic Values: Life, Liberty, Common Good, Rule of Law, Diversity

THE FOCUS QUESTION

What should happen to people who refuse to register for the draft?

THE PUBLIC POLICY ISSUE QUESTION

Should the United States government send to prison someone who refuses to register for the draft?

Notes:



Some Core Democratic Values of American Constitutional Democracy

Core democratic values are the fundamental beliefs and constitutional principles of American society. These values unite all Americans. They are expressed in the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, and other significant documents, speeches, and writings of the nation. Below is a list of some core democratic values. **You may use any core democratic value to support your position including those not on this list.** Be sure to explain **how** the value you choose supports the position you take.

Fundamental Beliefs

Life
Liberty
The Pursuit of Happiness
Public or Common Good
Justice
Equality
Diversity
Truth
Popular Sovereignty
Patriotism

Constitutional Principles

The Rule of Law
Separation of Powers
Representative Government
Checks and Balances
Individual Rights
Freedom of Religion
Federalism
Civilian Control of the Military

DEFINITIONS OF SOME CORE VALUES OF AMERICAN CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY

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FUNDAMENTAL BELIEFS

Life The individual's right to life should be considered inviolable except in certain highly restricted and extreme circumstances, such as the use of deadly force to protect one's own or others' lives.

Liberty The right to liberty is considered an unalterable aspect of the human condition. Central to this idea of liberty is the understanding that the political or personal obligations of parents or ancestors cannot be legitimately forced on people. The right to liberty includes **personal freedom**: the private realm in which the individual is free to act, to think and to believe, and which the government cannot legitimately invade; **political freedom**: the right to participate freely in the political process, choose and remove public officials, to be governed under a rule of law; the right to a free flow of information and ideas, open debate, and right of assembly; and **economic freedom**: the right to acquire, use, transfer, and dispose of private property without unreasonable governmental interference; the right to seek employment wherever one pleases; to change employment at will; and to engage in any lawful economic activity.

The Pursuit of Happiness It is the right of citizens in the American constitutional democracy to attempt to attain—"pursue"—happiness in their own way, so long as they do not infringe upon the rights of others.

Public or Common Good The public or common good requires that individual citizens have the commitment and motivation—that they accept their obligation—to promote the welfare of the community and to work together with other members for the greater benefit of all.

Justice People should be treated fairly in the distribution of the benefits and burdens of society, the correction of wrongs and injuries, and in the gathering of information and making of decisions.

Equality All citizens have: **political equality** and are not denied these rights unless by due process of law; **legal equality** and should be treated as equals before the law; **social equality** so as there should be no class hierarchy sanctioned by law; **economic equality** which tends to strengthen political and social equality—extreme economic inequality tends to undermine all other forms of equality and should therefore be avoided.

Diversity Variety in cultural and ethnic background, race, lifestyle, and belief is not only permissible but desirable and beneficial in a pluralist society.

Truth Citizens can legitimately demand that truth-telling as refraining from lying and full disclosure by government be the rule, since trust in the veracity of government constitutes an essential element of the bond between governors and governed.

Patriotism Virtuous citizens display a devotion to their country, including devotion to the fundamental values and principles upon which it depends.

FUNDAMENTAL CONSTITUTIONAL PRINCIPLES

Popular Sovereignty The citizenry is collectively the sovereign of the state and holds ultimate authority over public officials and their policies.

Rule of Law Both government and the governed should be subject to the law.

Separation of Powers Legislative, executive, and judicial powers should be exercised by different institutions in order to maintain the limitations placed upon them.

Representative Government The republican form of government established under the Constitution is one in which citizens elect others to represent their interests.

Checks and Balances The powers given to the different branches of government should be balanced, that is roughly equal, so that no branch can completely dominate the others. Branches of government are also given powers to check the power of other branches.

Individual Rights Fundamental to American constitutional democracy is the belief that individuals have certain basic rights that are not created by government but which government should protect. These are the right to life, liberty, economic freedom, and the “pursuit of happiness.” It is the purpose of government to protect these rights, and it may not place unfair or unreasonable restraints on their exercise. Many of these rights are enumerated in the Bill of Rights.

Freedom of Religion There shall be full freedom of conscience for people of all faiths or none. Religious liberty is considered to be a natural inalienable right that must always be beyond the power of the state to confer or remove. Religious liberty includes the right to freely practice any religion or no religion without government coercion or control.

Federalism Power is shared between two sets of governmental institutions, those of the states and those of the central or federal authorities, as stipulated by the Constitution.

Civilian Control of the Military Civilian authority should control the military in order to preserve constitutional government.

